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SUMMARY

On the assumption that a woman's physical and mental condition at childbirth is a product of her life-long daily habits and ideas as well as any particular injunctions set up to insure well-being in pregnancy and parturition, the cultural scene was searched to ascertain all possible relevancies.

The farmers of Bang Chan lived in a tropical, rice-growing terrain, annually flooded by the monsoon run-off. Food was plentiful even if cash was not. Except for better housing and equipment, and a greater enjoyment of market novelties, the rich lived much like the poor. The work in the fields by women paralleled that by men. Sharp physical demands, especially at planting and harvest, made them muscular.

At marriage the partners were fully mature and no woman was married against her wishes. The birth of a child was welcomed as leading to higher personal, social, and economic status.

The underlying concepts which explain why the food and other injunctions, both pre-natal and post-partum, and the ritual behavior took their particular forms, are explained.

The human body, harboring multiple immaterial souls, was seen as composed of earth, fire, water, and wind. Illness was caused by intrusive disruption of these four elements, or by soul loss. Food and medicines had properties which could be used to restore balance in the elements. The traditional curers or exorcisers had magical and herbal remedies obtained ritually from a teacher. Since Buddhist phrasings, often read from old texts in weekly sermons, molded Bang Chan's conception of life, the ultimate cause of health or illness was the presence or absence of merit. This determined one's *kam* (karma), the balance sheet of virtuous actions which one added to, or reduced by sinning throughout successive existences over eons of time.

The Buddhist cosmic view of individuals as separate autonomous beings brought it about that help was the only dynamic relationship possible between people. The bonds established by helping people on this earth, especially in the tasks of feeding priests, lasted on into successive incarnations. Thus, meritorious people met again and might marry again. Families had continuity over time, and babies were born into the "right"

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This economic picture indicates that from early childhood, women had engaged in such physical labor that by 18 years of age they had strong muscles and backs through lifting, stooping, and squatting. Since to stop work during pregnancy was construed as laziness, women worked vigorously up to the day of delivery. If a woman were delivered during one of the hectic seasons, she might shorten her post-natal rest to whatever she thought was a safe minimum.

Marriage

As people of the community often met at the temple, at ceremonies, and at work parties, there too young people met. Unmarried girls went freely and often alone on duties about the community, and also to Minburi to sell vegetables or take a load of paddy to the mill. To temple fairs and such they went in groups. Though parents hoped their children would marry within the community, a few young people "married out."

Girls were married between 17 and 27 or so, most frequently around 21 to 23. Since boys at 21 might have to serve 2 years in the army, and were urged to spend as well at least a few months in the priesthood, their marriages took place between 22 and 30, most often around 24 or so. Parents were in no hurry to marry off their grown children at the very age when their productivity was funneling wealth back into the family. However, if male help in the family were short, parents were more receptive to suitors. No girl was married against her wishes nor to a stranger.⁴ Marriages might be arranged through formal conversations opened by the man's family and carried on through a go-between, but the girl had the final say. A secret agreement between the partners might even precede negotiations. About half of the marriages were elopements, sometimes arranged because negotiations were dragging, sometimes to avoid the higher costs of more formal arrangements. Marriage, though largely based on socio-economic factors (Phillips:82) was not devoid of personal esteem. Sharp (Bang Chan data at Cornell) has a note on the desirable qualities in a husband as viewed by women. "Sexual virility," last on the list, was minimized in relation to such qualities as "religiousness," "wealth," "industriousness," which headed the list.

⁴. A person who uses magical means to force an unwilling woman's love "will be born 500 times as a mad dog."

APPENDIX

MUSLIM CUSTOMS IN BANG CHAN

The small Muslim minority in Bang Chan though maintaining its identity, lived scattered through every hamlet, with the heaviest concentration around the mosque at the southern edge of the village. The occasional inter-marriage of Buddhist and Muslim was eventually amicably adjusted to the community and the religion. Some Buddhists manifested a veiled hostility in calling the Muslims "stingy." One said, "Muslims have expensive medicine to induce abortion, after which they might kill the baby. A Buddhist would use this medicine to help deliver, but would not dare take life." The Muslim reputation as a source for powerful magic, especially for love and sorcery, bespeaks some edginess in the relations between the 2 ethnic groups, but Buddhists sometimes sought out the benefit of this magic.

In spite of these separatist tendencies, the Muslims were fully Thai citizens, and participated as equals with the Buddhists in the economic, political and much of the social life. The 2 groups were in many respects interdependent. The Muslims did not object to taking life, so acted as butchers for the Buddhists. Muslims were frequent patients of Buddhist ~~men~~, whether priests or lay. The only Muslim who did a little curing was the To Imam, head of the mosque, but few if any Buddhists came to him for cures. Because every ~~one~~ gave an annual ceremony of homage to his teacher attended by everyone who had benefited from those powers during the year, Muslims and Buddhists met amiably at several large feasts. These festivals were public displays, very competitive in feeling, of the success of the different ~~men~~. One became the largest of the village-wide festivities. Buddhist women attended the Muslim female midwife, teacher-rates, and vice versa. Buddhists and Muslims, especially the prominent families, attended each other's home ceremonies, such as weddings, tonsures, and that part of the ordination held in the home (the ~~then~~ ~~Imam~~). Separate kitchens were established at large Buddhist ceremonies so that Muslims could safely adhere to their one dietary regulation, the avoidance of pork. No such arrangements had to be made at Muslim ceremonies for Buddhists had no food taboos, and loved Muslim cooking.

Midwifery was an area of frank, harmonious interchange, with midwives of either religion often attending women of the other. Buddhist male midwives were allowed by the Muslim husbands to attend their wives, though female attendance was preferred. Satisfaction was expressed by Buddhist women over

125 It would deny any benefit that would arise out of continuous observation of each farm and farm operator through a series of years. With a view to retaining this benefit of continuity, we decided to adopt the first method -- that is, we included in the sample the ten new families branching out from the original sample-families. Thus, in our subsequent study in 1952 the size of our sample became 106 farm operating families.

There were, however, some types of data which involved records in the past four or five years, such as harvested crop during 1948-52, accumulation of wealth, major receipts and expenses during the same period. In these cases we naturally used the continuing sample of 96 families.

* 243 Composition of Farm Operating Families

162 Table 31 shows that the size of the farm operating
592 family decreased from 6.3 in 1948 to 5.7 in 1952. It also shows that, while the number of adults remained more or less constant, the decrease in the size of the family was due almost entirely to the decrease in the number of the young from 2.5 in 1948 to 2.0 in 1952.

* 243 A possible explanation for this lies in the economic
162 consequence of the war. Strict government control of the
592 price of rice and of the internal movement of paddy during
132 the war and also in the immediate postwar period has so
178 adversely affected the economic condition of rice farmers
• [52] that marriage has often been postponed. In cases where

243 marriage did take place, the couple were usually obliged
162 to stay with the parents of either the husband or the wife.
178 It is reasonable to believe that the nascent period was
592 prolonged during this period of hard times. Thus, the
182 family size tended to be larger than it normally is. This
• [582] is especially true for rice farming families where there
always is some work for members able to work. It is not
surprising, then, that the average size of farm operating
families in Bangchan was 6.3 in 1948 while the average size
of all families was 5.7 according to the 1949 census. A
steady rise in the price of paddy after the war has improved
the economic condition of rice farmers. The increased in-
come, however, had to be spent first on replacement of equip-
ment and housing facilities which had been long overdue.
[792] Finally, the bumper crop of 1948 with an ever-increasing
price put an end to farm misery, and the following dry
season saw a record number of newly ordained priests and
[591] merit making activities. From then on proportionately more
marriages took place and there were fewer economic obstacles
to keep newly wed couples from starting out independently.
The combined effect of termination of prolonged nascent
period and freer establishment of new families was that
the size of the farm operating family was considerably re-
duced.

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It may seem strange that more marriages should bring
about a drop in the number of the young from 2.5 per family
in 1948 to 2.0 in 1952. By the young is meant, however,